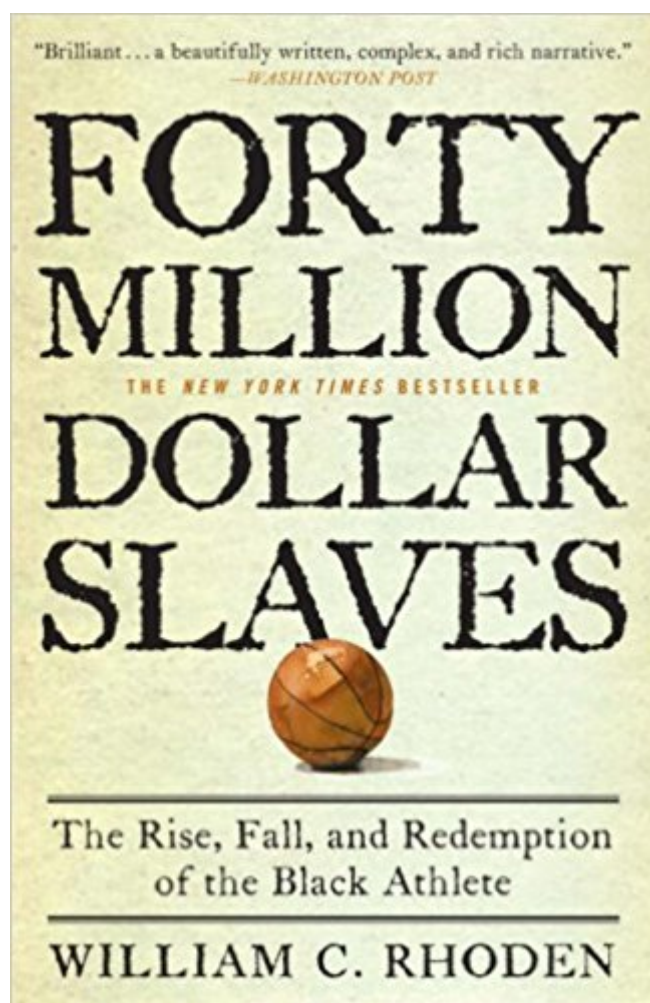


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# Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, And Redemption Of The Black Athlete



## Synopsis

From Jackie Robinson to Muhammad Ali and Arthur Ashe, African American athletes have been at the center of modern culture, their on-the-field heroics admired and stratospheric earnings envied. But for all their money, fame, and achievement, says New York Times columnist William C. Rhoden, black athletes still find themselves on the periphery of true power in the multibillion-dollar industry their talent built. Provocative and controversial, Rhoden's \$40 Million Slaves weaves a compelling narrative of black athletes in the United States, from the plantation to their beginnings in nineteenth-century boxing rings to the history-making accomplishments of notable figures such as Jesse Owens, Althea Gibson, and Willie Mays. Rhoden reveals that black athletes' "evolution" has merely been a journey from literal plantations "where sports were introduced as diversions to quell revolutionary stirrings" to today's figurative ones, in the form of collegiate and professional sports programs. He details the "conveyor belt" that brings kids from inner cities and small towns to big-time programs, where they're cut off from their roots and exploited by team owners, sports agents, and the media. He also sets his sights on athletes like Michael Jordan, who he says have abdicated their responsibility to the community with an apathy that borders on treason. The power black athletes have today is as limited as when masters forced their slaves to race and fight. The primary difference is, today's shackles are often the athletes' own making.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

New York Times columnist Rhoden offers a charged assessment of the state of black athletes in America, using the pervasive metaphor of the plantation to describe a modern sports industry defined by white ownership and black labor. The title and the notion behind it are sure to raise eyebrows, and Rhoden admits that his original title of *Lost Tribe Wandering*, for all its symbolic elegance, lacked punch. And Rhoden isn't pulling any of his. Rather than seeing rags-to-riches stories where underprivileged athletes reach the Promised Land by way of their skills, he casts the system as one in which those athletes are isolated from their backgrounds, used to maximize profit and instilled with a mindset "whereby money does not necessarily alter one's status as 'slave,' as long as the 'owner' is the one who controls the rules that allow that money to be made." Rhoden's writing is intelligent and cogent, and his book's tone is hardly as inflammatory as its name. It's possible that his title and working metaphor will turn off readers who will simply refuse to consider young men making millions of dollars playing a game to be disenfranchised. Nevertheless, this is an insightful look at the role of blacks in sports they dominate but hardly control. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Adult/High School "Rhoden's provocative thesis is that today's black athletes are akin to pre-Civil War plantation slaves, because slavery had as much to do with power and control as it had to do with wealth. The big-money sports in America "football, baseball, basketball" are owned and controlled almost exclusively by white men, and yet each has a disproportionately large percentage of black athletes. They are well paid, but they have no direct power over the current and future direction of these sports. More than that, they lack any real control over their roles within these sports. The author supports his position with a well-researched and thoughtfully rendered survey of the history of the black athlete. From plantation-born jockeys and boxers of the early 19th century, to the NBA of Michael Jordan and Larry Johnson, Rhoden remains focused on prevailing structures of racism. He notes the accomplishments and frustrations of several well-known figures, including Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, Jesse Owens, and Willie Mays, as well as others who have faded from our collective memory. In doing so, he examines the damaging effects of what he calls the conveyor belt in the contemporary sports world, where children as young as 11 and 12 are pegged as prospects and viewed as potential sources of income through middle school, high school, and college. This book will no doubt spark controversy, but will also prove to be a lasting contribution to the history of race relations in America." Robert Saunderson, Berkeley Public Library, CA  
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text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Author, William C. Rhoden, in his book, FORTY MILLION DOLLAR SLAVES, admonishes the black athlete for dropping the "sense of mission" that the black community entrusted with them. The black community sent its best athletes forth, to raise the status of the athletes and at the same time, raise the status and well being of their communities. They accomplished the first of this two-part dream----they raised their own status and fame. The second part of this contract---raising the status and well being of the black community---was not to happen. They were not ready for the white-backlash that wanted.(wants, still) ...nothing more than to wean itself from dependence on black muscle." But hope is not lost for the black athlete, nor is it lost for the black community. The author sees signs of redemption for both. Until that day of redemption comes, though, black athletes will continue to enhance the very system that enslaves them.

This book is exceptionally well-written, and the information is invaluable. The one caveat, however, is that if one is not heavily, or even partially, in to sports and athletes, regardless of color, I am certain there are other reads out there. Noticeably, a book of this caliber is of course analyzing the history, success, and failures of the black athlete, which, obviously, and unfortunately, is nothing new. Black people in this still and continual racist society have always been identified with sports and athletics. How about we as black find other ways to seek and acquire power--power of all sorts.

I feel that Laurie Kunkel's review should be removed because it is very obvious in her remarks that she is a racist and hasn't read the book. EVERYONE has problems or has felt mistreated or disregarded in some way, therefore, reading the book would require an open mind versus someone assuming that this is just another black person complaining.

Good overview of the plight of the African American athlete, and their responsibility to build a better future for the future generation of athletes to pursue and change the current power relationship between black athlete and white owner.

40 Million Dollar Slaves is what we are calling sporting stars. The NFL, NBA, pro baseball, and the NCAA are all plantations whose raw materials are the young black men who have the skills to perform on the different teams(plantations) of the rich owners. The book talks about the history of sports in the USA. What happened in the 18th, 19th and the 20th centuries, and continue into the

21st century. This is a must read for young men and women(of any race or nationally)and their parents to read and understand before they allow their children to play big league sports.

Excellent!

The book was recommended to me by a friend of mine, and it did not disappoint. The author provides historical context of race in sports. I highly recommend this book.

This is an excellent book

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